

NATURAL RESOURCES

RARE BIRDS

Indicator 16. Rare Birds

Background Kentucky has a rich diversity of birds. Some 350 native species of birds are found in Kentucky (168 of which nest or breed in the state), adding to the state's biological diversity and our quality of life. But 29 percent of the native bird species in Kentucky are considered rare.

The population of birds rises and falls due to a number of complex factors, including weather, pollution, food supply and changes in land use. The Breeding Bird Survey for Kentucky reveals that 25 of the 69 bird species with a statistically valid sample size show a long-term (33-year) decline in populations, while 21 species are increasing and 23 show no significant change.¹

One of the most significant factors in the decline of many migratory songbird species is habitat loss. For some species, such as the Cerulean warbler, which has declined an average of 5.9 percent annually for the past 30 years, loss and fragmentation of breeding grounds (mature hardwood bottomland forests) and wintering habitat (tropical forests of South America) have contributed to the decline. Some grassland birds, like the Grasshopper sparrow, may also be declining in Kentucky due habitat loss and conversion of grassland to row crops. Approximately 14 percent of the 350 native bird species in Kentucky are considered rare.

Goal Enhance, restore and protect wildlife diversity and support sustainable use.

Progress Efforts to restore threatened and endangered bird species in Kentucky continue with mixed results. One of the most successful bird recovery efforts to date has been the bald eagle. The banning of the pesticide DDT and laws to protect habitat and prohibit hunting are credited for the comeback of the bald eagle. Nationwide efforts have been so successful that the status of the bald eagle has been upgraded from endangered to threatened.² There are now 5,748 nesting pairs of bald eagles nationwide, up from 417 in the 1970s. In Kentucky, there are 23 nesting pairs of bald eagles located in western counties of Ballard, Carlisle, Fulton, Henderson, Hickman, Hopkins, Lyon and Trigg. In 2000, Kentucky also saw the first successful nesting pair of bald eagles in eastern Kentucky.

Another restoration success story is the osprey. Between 1981 and 1991, 133 osprey were released at Land Between the Lakes, Laurel Lake and other sites. Osprey is considered on the road to recovery with 25 active nests in 2000. Efforts are also underway to bring the peregrine falcon back to Kentucky. Between 1993 and 1999, 82 falcons were released in downtown Lexington, at the Kentucky Utilities Ghent Power Plant in Winchester, and at the E.W. Brown Power Plant at Lake Herrington. State fish and wildlife officials plan to release more falcons in 2001 in rural areas along cliff lines with the goal of establishing at least three breeding pairs in the state. A pair of falcons from restoration efforts in nearby states has taken up residence in Louisville and has successfully bred there since 1995. As of 1999, the American peregrine falcon is no longer listed as federally threatened or endangered.

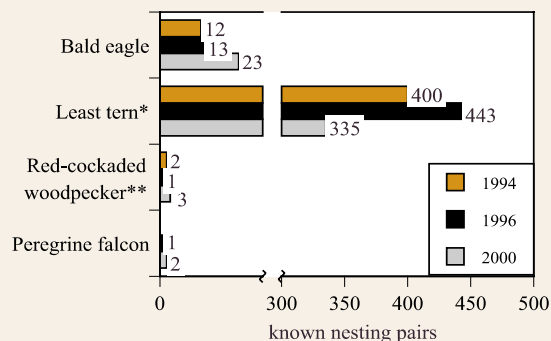
Efforts to restore other bird species in Kentucky have not been as successful. The U.S. Forest Service initiated measures to improve the chances for recovery of the red-cockaded woodpecker with measures to enhance the bird's mature pine-grassland community on the Daniel Boone National Forest. Among the measures used were prescribed fire and the removal of midstory trees. The number of red-cockaded woodpeckers increased to 23 (including 3 nesting pairs), due in large part to a reintroduction program.

At a Glance

Number of native bird species in Kentucky
.....350

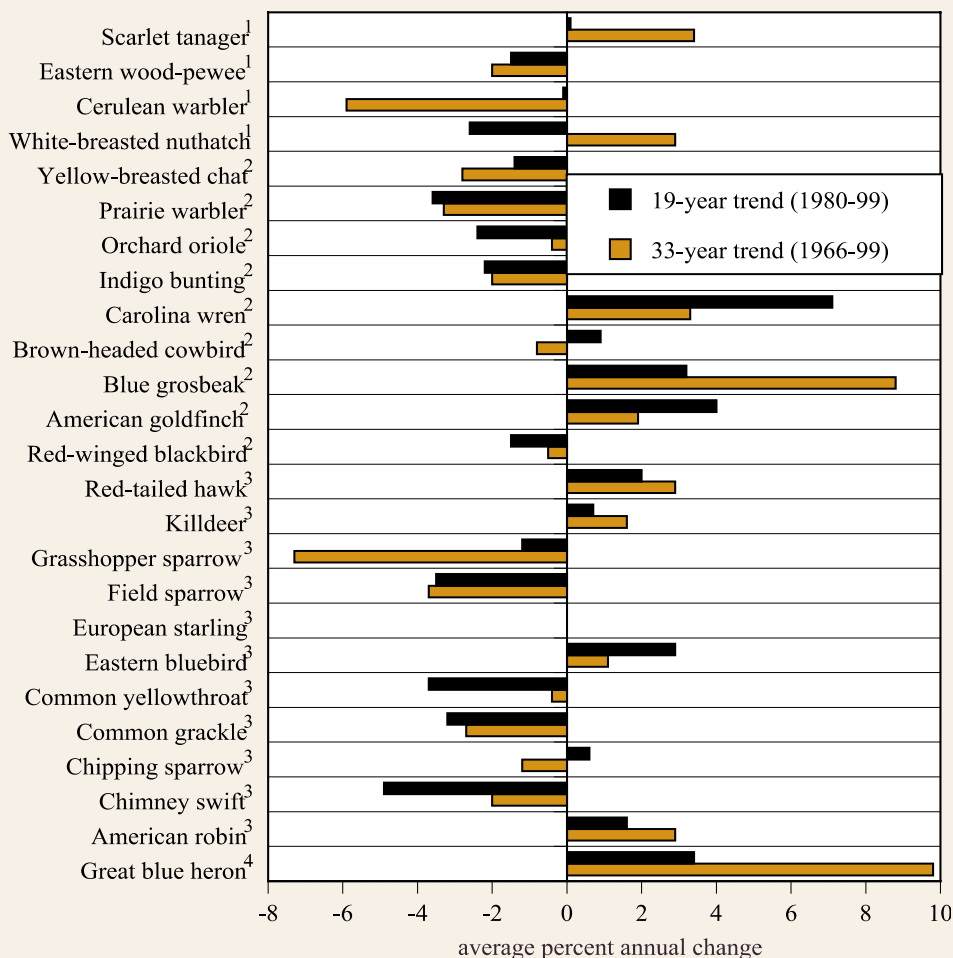
Number of bird species at risk.....49

Measure 1. Federally Endangered and Threatened Bird Species in Kentucky



RARE BIRDS

Measure 2. Selective Bird Population Trends in Kentucky



However, extensive damage to roosting trees in the southern Cumberland Plateau by an infestation of southern pine beetles in 1999 and 2000 has forced the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to move all red-cockaded woodpeckers from Kentucky to the Sandhills National Wildlife Refuge in South Carolina and the Ouachita National Forest in Arkansas. Plans are being developed to restore lost habitat and return the bird to Kentucky's forests in the future.³

Footnotes

1. The best overall data on bird population trends in the state are collected as part of the national North American Breeding Bird Survey. While the survey is limited by several factors, including limited sample size for certain species, it still serves as an important tool to identify native bird species at risk.
2. "The Bald Eagle is Back!," U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, press release 7/2/00. Web site - <http://www.fws.gov/r9extaff/eaglejuly2.html>.
3. "Federal and State Partners to Rescue Red-cockaded Woodpeckers from Daniel Boone National Forest," U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, press release, March 7, 2001.

Measures - notes and sources

Measure 1. Species with statistically significant long-term or short-term trends. 1. Woodland habitat. 2. Brush/mixed habitat. 3. Farm/open land habitat. 4. Water/marsh habitat. Source: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Breeding Bird Survey, Ky. State Nature Preserves Commission.

Measure 2. Earlier and historic data not available. *Based on site surveys and estimates. Source: Ky. Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources, U.S. Forest Service.